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RECRUITMENT ON PAPER, RECRUITMENT ON THE WEB: AN
EXAMINATION OF THE RHETORICAL STRATEGIES USED IN EACH
MEDIUM

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of English

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Danielle Amorena Glanzer

September 1998

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Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
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requirements for the degree Master of Arts,
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

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Chairperson *Irvin Beckham*

Date *9/3/98*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the recruitment and Web professionals at the University of Northern Iowa, University of Texas at San Antonio, and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Also, I would like to thank thesis committee members Dr. Nora Bacon and Dr. Leslie Turner who provided valuable guidance during the writing process. And a big thank you to the thesis committee chair and my master's program advisor, Dr. Irvin Peckham. This study would have been possible without all of your contributions.

RECRUITMENT ON PAPER, RECRUITMENT ON THE WEB: AN EXAMINATION OF THE RHETORICAL STRATEGIES USED IN EACH MEDIUM

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University of Nebraska, 1998

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This study examines the rhetoric of college and university recruitment on paper and on the Internet. In particular, the centers on the difference between the two media in relation to their readers, writers, and final texts. A triangulated research approach was used: text analysis, interviews with writers and readers, and reader surveys that included open- and closed-ended questions. The printed and electronic recruitment materials of three peer institutions of the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) formed the basis of the research. Those institutions included the University of Northern Iowa (UNI), the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC). The research revealed that writers of recruitment messages approach their tasks differently, depending on the medium they work in. Printed and electronic text, while essentially the same in content, is presented within the boundaries or possibilities of its medium.

Readers received the recruitment messages through both venues, with the printed text having more impact. However, participant surveys showed that students relied very little upon printed university publications to make their university selection choices. In addition, the participants in my study did not utilize the Internet for their college search process. As technology moves into more homes and schools, this no doubt will change. Therefore more research in Web rhetoric would be beneficial.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Challenge

A station wagon pulls onto College Drive, winding its way past the bell tower to the residence hall. Inside sit Brenda, a freshman, and Mrs. Smith, a worried parent, plus all the requisite supplies for the first year away from home. It would seem that the adventure has just begun. In reality, the road to college began over a year ago, when Brenda began requesting and receiving information about colleges and universities. Months of reading promotional literature, talking with guidance counselors, visiting campuses, and talking with friends led to the actual application for admission. The process becomes a prolonged exercise in comparison shopping, with students and parents looking for the best buy.

Universities advertise their programs by preparing polished recruitment publications called viewbooks and official university Web sites. The communicative goal for university recruitment publications, both printed and electronic, is the same: “... establish awareness of the existence of the college, create inquisitiveness about the nature of the college, build interest to a peak, or stimulate the prospect to act (Grabowski 23). Reader responses vary from sending a business reply card requesting specific information on programs or activities, picking up the phone to make an appointment for a campus visit, or sending an e-mail to the admissions office. While the communication goal may be the same, the communications are presented very differently.

The challenge for college and university recruitment personnel is to create a publication, known as a viewbook, that will stand apart from the

hundreds of others that bombard high school senior mailboxes during the course of a year. Jazzy photos, bright colors, and snappy text are all part of the recipe for successful recruitment, say publications professionals David R. Treadwell and Jane Eblen Keller (24).

At the heart of each recruitment medium is the message itself. The media, messages, and the words used to convey them can begin to run together for the harried student. The benefits must be evident and compelling or the viewbook will hit the trash with a convincing “thwump” and the Web site will be clicked into oblivion. Despite the negative connotation that surrounds the words “advertising” and “selling,” that is exactly what these pieces do. But, just how does a university sell its product to potential students?

The marketing experts tell universities to promote outcomes, which are turned into the selling points of the marketing message (Braxton 65). Differentiation is another strategy marketers recommend: “Differentiation involves distinguishing yourself from your competition in ways that are achievable and that students find meaningful” (Sevier 13).

Even though university marketing messages in the 1990s are guided by these maxims, the messages are shaped by differing authors and media. Consequently, readers will perceive them differently.

1.2 The Questions

While both the viewbook and the Web site convey a rhetoric of recruitment, a combination of persuasion and informative writing, how does the medium affect the message? The importance of analyzing the modes of

persuasion on the Internet cannot be overlooked. Will electronic text eventually supersede printed text? Computing guru and Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates predicts that " ... 60 percent of all homes in the United States will have computers by 2001, and of those homes, 85 percent will be connected to the Internet.¹ Clearly the Web will continue to affect the ways in which people communicate.

For writers of recruitment messages and managers of institutional promotional budgets, it's important to know which medium produces the most benefits in relation to the amount of time and money spent.

Identifying the characteristics of Web rhetoric is beneficial to rhetoricians because the Internet is not limited to the world of sales and marketing. The Internet provides information and a common ground for an entire community of learners.

As a student of rhetoric and a writer of recruitment messages myself, I decided to study the rhetoric of recruitment. In particular, I wanted to examine the difference between the two media in relation to their readers, writers, and final texts. The following questions guided me through my research of printed and electronic recruitment rhetoric:

- 1) What are the rhetorical strategies of college and university printed and electronic recruitment messages?
- 2) How do writers of recruitment messages approach their tasks? How does the medium affect the writing process?
- 3) Which medium is more effective, in light of its audiences and purpose?

I discovered during the course of my literature search that sources on Web rhetoric are scarce, due no doubt to the infancy of the medium. Sources on the rhetoric of university recruitment publications are just as uncommon, perhaps because it's such a specialized genre. Demographic, economic, and technological changes all affect student enrollment. Consequently, the ways students will "shop" for universities and colleges will continue to change as well. Further research in the area of print and electronic recruitment rhetoric can map patterns in student reception of recruitment messages and guide decisions to improve communication of those messages.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Articles relevant to my study fall into two categories: marketing theory and “how-to” directives for both university viewbooks and Web sites.

2.1 Marketing Theory

There was a time, before the 1980s, when universities and colleges did not employ advertising and marketing strategies to promote their programs (Miklich 257). However, increased competition for tuition dollars from a shrinking pool of prospective students forced higher education institutions to “re-examine those attributes or characteristics that help to differentiate one college from another” (Matthews and Hadley 22). Marketing theorists helped in that re-examination process.

The marketing theorists point to the importance of informing potential students of the “outcomes” of attending a specific higher education institution. Outcomes such as increased intellectual, social, personal, and career/vocational development are markers of an institution’s perceived quality. A natural communication vehicle for these outcomes, or benefits, is the university viewbook (Braxton 65).

Part of presenting outcomes in an effective manner is understanding “the information processing state of the consumer ... in terms of the various attitudes and beliefs about a particular college or university” (Berger and Wallingford 63). Once recruiters identify the six stages of a consumer’s information processing system (awareness, knowledge, liking, preference,

conviction, and purchase), they can prepare communications that best target consumers during these stages. For example, Berger Wallingford recommend communications that are broad and identify the institution for use during the "awareness" stage. During the knowledge stage, copy is most effective if it "focuses on providing the prospective student with a variety of information with details about the degree programs, resources, and extracurricular activities available to the students" (68). Communications during the "liking" stage should become more personal and warm, while actual campus visits can move potential students to the "preference" stage. Scholarships are an effective way to move students from "preference" to "conviction." Finally, personal letters or phone calls may be the convincing type of communication needed to convert "conviction" to "purchase."

Higher education marketing expert John Braxton also stresses the importance of knowing the ways students make college selection choices. He breaks down the selection process into stages as well: predisposition, search, and choice (58). Published communications come into play during the "search" stage. The publications will reflect and project the institution's image, which may, in fact, already have affected the student's choice during the predisposition stage.

Robert Sevier also examines the importance of image in recruitment efforts. Sevier, a higher education marketing consultant, defines image as a "... set of attitudes or beliefs that a person or audience holds about an institution" (62). Many of these beliefs are based upon prior knowledge of the institution. The power of image, good or bad, can influence a prospective

student's final decision. For example, Sevier points out that a poor publication can negatively project onto other aspects of the university. Interestingly, one indicator of a weak image, according to Sevier's research, is a difficulty in communicating a clear message (63).

Larry Brooks and James Hammons suggest that colleges and universities employ a "services" marketing approach, rather than a "product" marketing approach. One defining factor of a services marketing approach is the intangibility of services. According to the researchers, "A product can be physically examined by a potential buyer to determine that product's ability to deliver satisfaction. A service ... cannot be handled, smelled, felt, tried on, or test driven" (28). One way that institutions can counteract this intangibility is through their recruitment publications. Brooks' and Hammons' study of seven successfully marketed colleges showed that using student testimonials and publicizing faculty and administrator credentials provided tangible evidence of institutional quality (44).

Quality, or rather, perceived quality, influences students' college selection, write marketing researchers Mabel Jones Matthews and Thomas Hadley. Here again, the experts stress the importance of colleges and universities understanding the buying decision process and role of quality in that process (23). Matthews and Hadley's research revealed that students applied to institutions with a high perceived quality. Effective communication strategies that convey an image of quality are recommended to increase students' awareness of an institution (29).

Since 1994, an alternate recruiting medium — the Internet — has

deflected the recruitment focus from printed matter to World Wide Web home pages. Thanks to sophisticated web editing software, beautiful, polished online “publications” can be created relatively quickly and much more cheaply than through traditional methods. University home pages have become instantaneous “viewbooks.” A 1995 Chronicle of Higher Education article substantiates this phenomenon: “More than 600 four-year colleges in the United States have Web pages on the Internet, providing such things as course catalogues, faculty directories, admissions information, maps of campuses, and even recordings of fight songs” (DeLoughry 19). Three years later, university presence on the Web is even greater. The University of Florida’s “American Universities” Web site,² maintained by Michael Conlon, provides links to approximately 1,500 American institutions of higher education.

While universities are facing the challenge of marketing to a dwindling student enrollment base, they are also presented with the opportunity to target this narrowing market with two especially cogent message venues. Obviously the media are different — the published message is static, while the Web is dynamic; the viewbook offers the luxury of truly “hands-on” browsing, while the Web presents sound and video clips at the click of a mouse. The Web enjoys an interactive capability between reader and text not possible in the traditional paper format. With these new capabilities come changes, including the manner in which a reader “reads” or navigates through a Web site.³ Consequently, the rhetorical situation of each medium is different — the writer, the audience, and the text itself.

For example, writers who create copy for viewbooks are operating in a sphere of tried-and-true practices, whereas Web authors function in a technological and rhetorical frontier. Viewbook writers can look to seasoned veterans and numerous articles for help when composing published recruitment messages. Web authors, on the other hand, are first-generation professionals who must rely upon experimentation and exploration for answers.

With the advent of Web technology, many universities simply translated their viewbooks into hypertext, the electronic format used on the Internet.⁴ In fact, communications professionals at the time encouraged this practice (Fisher 2). As more and more people went online, communicators began to view the Web as a viable communications tool. Today, second-thought hypertext translations don't cut it in the competitive Web environment (Sugarman 18). Christine Quinn, Manager of the Computer Team at Stanford University, recommends universities put just as much time, planning, and dollars into the development of quality Web sites as they put into publications (51). Now, the difference between a first-rate Web site and a mediocre one is as evident as the difference between a six-color glossy publication and a mimeographed flyer.

2.2 How-To Directives

Increased competition among higher education institutions coupled with a nationwide drop in enrollment that began in the 1990s has prompted many of the communications practitioners to listen to the messages coming from the marketing experts. Once the theory is established, the

communicator can go about telling the message in a variety of ways.

2.2.1 Viewbooks

The viewbook, a glossy, multi-color look at a university's positive aspects, serves as the major recruitment publication targeted to the high school college-bound senior. Many hours and dollars go into the production (writing, designing, and printing) of the publication. The purpose of the university viewbook is to offer would-be applicants a look at the school, and invite the reader to visit campus for a closer look. Some students take the intermediary step of completing an information request card found inside the viewbook, usually incorporated into the physical design of the piece.

Viewbook writer Janet Jai's advice to fellow recruitment message writers is clear: think before you write. She recommends that the writer answer the questions "What are your publications' primary goals?" and "Who is your audience?" before composing any marketing message. After the writer knows the answers to these questions, she can follow some of Jai's specific tips such as:

- 1) Use plenty of headlines and subheads, and write them to highlight your [institution's] strengths;
- 2) Describe benefits as well as features;
- 3) Don't be afraid to blow your own horn;
- 4) Bring your campus to life by evoking its ambience and culture; and
- 5) Focus on the positive, (26).

Directions about appealing to a college-age audience are provided by

Karen Worley. She believes the primary goal of a recruitment publication is to get the student to read the publication (28). The best way to accomplish this goal is to know the audience in relation to its culture and attitude. The message can be written humorously or seriously, but whatever the style, the message must be true (29).

Communications professionals David Treadwell and Jane Eblen Keller also emphasize honesty in viewbook copy writing. Regarding style, they write, "We simply urge the accurate and careful choice of words ... proper punctuation, and standard grammar. We are champions of the active voice and enemies of the slangily hip and academic" (26).

2.2.2 Web Pages

Many articles regarding Web how-to's have been published; however, much of the information centers on the technical and design aspects of building a Web site. Articles regarding Web rhetoric are rare. Professor Daniel Anderson at the University of North Carolina comments on the scarcity of materials dealing with Web rhetoric: "As far as I know there haven't been any significant studies about the process of writing hypertexts, especially for the Web."

Even so, the World Wide Web itself provide some guidance regarding Web design and editorial style. Two online style guides, The Sun Microsystems Guide to Web Style written by Rick Levine and Yale University's Yale C/AIM Web Style Guide written by Patrick J. Lynch and Sarah Horton offer instruction regarding presentation and overall "style."

The Sun style guide address writers/designers who create Web pages to

sell products. Levine recommends that “selling” pages should provide easy-to-find information about the product, utilize a short page format, and offer a way for readers to make a purchase (online order form). A selling page, according to Levine, should not offer links to competitors’ sites. In addition to these instructions, Levine suggests that Web page creators first determine the page’s purpose and audience.

Like the Sun style guide, the Yale guide states that understanding the true purpose of the Web site is the first step in creating one. The Yale guide is much longer than the Sun guide and offers detailed instruction on organization and interface design. Editorial style is touched upon briefly, with the mantra “consistency” stressed throughout. Overall, the Yale guide focuses more on the visual aspect of Web page creation.

A third source, Jutta Degener’s online style guide, What is good hypertext writing? provides more insight into writing for an electronic environment. She explains that even in the ultra-modern setting of the Internet, age-old rhetorical concerns such as the audience and purpose cannot be forgotten. Degener contends that “writing” for the Web is really “editing” because the information constantly changes. Of course, she draws attention to the computing considerations of hypertext writing such as latency (the time necessary to navigate through the Web), memory (documents that are “too large” and cannot pass through the bandwidth of the author’s and/or readers’ Internet connection), and possible disorientation of visitors to a site (caused by less than discriminating search engines).

Lee Andresen explores the issues in text design and layout for

computer based communications. Written in 1991, the article doesn't take into account the phenomenon of communication on the Web. Nevertheless, Andresen's recommendations for clear text and presentation reflect upon today's Web environment. His ultimate question seems especially relevant: " ... should printed text conventions be automatically assumed to set limits on what is permissible or appropriate in the text of an electronic medium?" (260).

Linda Jorgensen emphasizes that although writing for printed and electronic media requires adaptations for each, the desired reader responses, "paying attention, remembering, learning and even now and then *enjoying* the content of a publication," remain the same (5). She compares writing for a printed newsletter and an online one. One of the most significant differences is the way online readers will approach the text. "There's no 'normal' reading. Readers may skip from C to Z to B to M to L to K with points in between left out" (6).

Charles Kostelnick offers a short history of visual and verbal communication from penmanship to desktop publishing. Traditionally, visual and verbal rhetoric have been considered separately. Kostelnick believes that today's technology requires a blended view: " ... desktop typography demands a unified rhetoric that acknowledges the interweaving of visual and verbal elements during the document design process" (97).

While the literature examines rhetoric at work in the differing environments of paper and the Internet, there is no comparative study of higher education recruitment rhetorics on paper and on the Web. The

remainder of this study will compare the recruitment messages of three universities as seen in their viewbooks and their Internet sites.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In order to examine the rhetoric of college and university recruitment thoroughly, I opted for a triangulated research approach: text analysis, interviews with writers and readers, and reader surveys that included open- and closed-ended questions.

3.1 Data Collection

I decided to study the recruitment messages of universities similar to the one where I work, the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). The following universities have similar missions, student clientele, and academic characteristics as the UNO, according to a 1996 review of peer institutions: Cleveland State University; Wichita State University; University of Northern Iowa; University of Colorado at Denver; University of Missouri at St. Louis; University of Arkansas at Little Rock; Northern Illinois University; University of Texas at San Antonio; Portland State University; and University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

I made initial contact with the universities in my study through their official World Wide Web sites. I informally browsed through the university web sites, looking for undergraduate admissions information. Using Common Gateway Interface (CGI) forms found on their admissions pages, I requested that printed information about their university be mailed to my home. I received the information within two weeks of my Internet request.

Publication availability and participant willingness later narrowed my study to three: the University of Northern Iowa (UNI), the University of

Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC).

I examined each university's paper and electronic recruitment texts on three levels: interviews with the message author(s) (What are the messages and what determines them?), text analysis (How are those messages written?), and focus group analysis (Are the messages effective?).

The two-pronged focus of my study split my data collection into two distinct phases. First, I developed a method and applied it to the viewbook analysis, then I repeated the method for the Web page analysis.

3.1.1 The Writer

I contacted the authors via e-mail to request a phone interview to ascertain the criteria used to shape the recruitment messages (research, informal perceptions, committee dictums, or nothing). The phone interview process took place during a five-week period.

I interviewed the authors of three viewbooks used in my study. I asked twelve questions (supplied to the interviewee before the interview via e-mail) pertaining to recruitment publication text production (see Appendix A). The questions covered the areas of message production, the actual writing process (process and style considerations), copy approval procedures, and the testing of recruitment publication effectiveness. I also asked each interviewee for the name of the person responsible for the university Web content. I transcribed each interview, highlighting the writer's perception of the message for later comparison to the students' perceptions of individual publication messages.

After completing the interviews with the viewbook authors, I conducted phone interviews with the people whose name had been supplied to me by the viewbook authors. The interview questions were similar — regarding message production, writing process, content approval procedures, and audience feedback (see Appendix B). I transcribed the interviews, this time highlighting interviewee responses to questions about the writing process and message purpose. The interviews with Web site authors/maintainers were conducted over a four-week time period.

3.1.2 The Text

Second, I focused on the style, or the “how,” of presenting the university recruitment messages. I analyzed the viewbooks and Web pages for the writer’s tone and attitude toward the audience.

I examined the rhetorical style of each viewbook and Web page using George Dillon’s method⁵ for identifying the footing (or relationship) between writer and reader. I chose Dillon’s model for two reasons. First, I agree with Dillon’s premise that writing provides an active example of the interpersonal function of language. After all, writing contains the beliefs of one person, who by placing them into text, offers it to an audience for acceptance. It’s up to the reader to accept it or not. Dillon explains further: “The relation of writing/reading may be dramatized as a communicative event, as it were, even before the question of action is raised ... but there is very little persuasive writing without it. It is human subjects who persuade and are persuaded” (4). Second, he applied it to a specific genre: self-help books which appeal to the reader on a personal level. The persuasive cast of college

and university recruitment messages also appeal directly to the reader. Therefore, I felt that Dillon's model would translate well when applied to these "personalized" messages. As part of the analysis I looked for pronoun usage. According to Dillon, the heavy use of first and second person pronouns constitutes a close writer/reader relationship (21). There are exceptions, of course. Dillon points out that first and second pronouns used in a general sense, such as "'If you try hard, you will get ahead,'" or "'When we are depressed, we sometimes cannot control our tempers,'" become impersonal (21). I also paid attention to vocabulary clues — the bigger the word, the bigger the chance it could distance the writer from the reader. Also, I looked at the structure of the text itself. In Dillon's analysis, longer sentences establish a more formal relationship between writer and reader, whereas shorter sentences create a casual and closer writer/reader relationship.

While it was easy to analyze the text on each Web page using Dillon's method, it was clear that the uniqueness of the hypertext environment with its links to images, movies and sound bites, would require an additional "yardstick" with which to measure its textual and visual rhetoric. I looked to the Web itself for help. A search of the online Kairos Journal for Teachers of Writing in Webbed Environments site yielded an "Analysis and Evaluation of WWW Sites" assignment created by Douglas Eyman. Eyman's concern with textual and visual elements provided a balanced method for me to use as I analyzed the Web sites. The guiding questions on the analysis critique site content, presentation, and organization including the following: the

appropriateness of the content, ratio of image to text, ease of reading (layout), time required to load the page onto the screen, the manner of site navigation, and whether or not text is connected to text or the term “click here” (a stylistic no-no). After establishing this framework, I then applied Dillon’s textual analysis.

3.1.3 The Reader

Finally, to gauge the efficacy of the recruitment publication messages, I conducted two focus groups. The focus groups were composed of students enrolled in a first year composition course at UNO. Students discussed their reactions to the university viewbooks during the first focus group. The second focus group was used to measure students’ reactions to the university Web sites. I gathered students’ reactions in both groups through an informal taped discussion session and short anonymous surveys, one of a general nature, the other coded for responses to individual publications and Web sites.

Two anonymous survey sets were handed out to the focus group participants. All thirty-two participants were enrolled in three sections of a freshman-level English course. The course instructor allowed me to use a fifty-minute class period to conduct the viewbook focus group in the classroom. For the Web site focus group, the instructor allowed me to use thirty minutes in a departmental computer lab. The College Selection Student Survey (see Appendix C) focused on the students’ overall experiences with recruitment publications and information gathering techniques during the college selection process. The Recruitment Publications Student Survey

(see Appendix D), requested specific feedback concerning students' reactions to sample metropolitan university viewbooks. Participants in the Web site focus groups were given the Web Site Student Survey (see Appendix E) coded for each university Web site reviewed. The students were then directed to browse each site, using Netscape Navigator 2.0, for five to seven minutes, placing themselves in the role of a prospective applicant. The students filled out the Web Site Surveys while they navigated through the individual Web sites. The students completed the Web surveys in twenty minutes.

After spending about twenty to thirty minutes reviewing the publications and Web sites, I initiated a group discussion, aided by the class instructor. Our questions were aimed at tapping the participants' initial reactions to the publications:

- 1) Which viewbook made a profound impression upon you?
- 2) Which publications were boring to you?
- 3) What feelings did a certain publication create and how?

In the Web page focus group, the instructor and myself asked similar questions:

- 1) Which Web site stood out the most?
- 2) Were you able to find the information you were looking for?
- 3) Would the site influence you to apply there?

The discussion sessions lasted about twenty minutes and were audio-taped. The recordings were later transcribed and analyzed for common response patterns among the participants.

I tallied the responses to the closed-ended questions and recorded

answers to open-ended questions on the College Selection Student Survey. I averaged the responses to the final question, which asked the respondent to rate the most important factors in choosing a college.

I focused on the respondents' perceptions of university benefits reported in the Recruitment Publications Student Survey, paying special attention to patterns of common responses. When I reviewed the Web Site Student Surveys, I highlighted the students' responses to the perceived university benefits, this time looking for responses that matched or differed from responses on the Recruitment Publications Student Survey.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

The research revealed similarities in purpose and differences in approach between recruitment rhetoric written for paper publication and recruitment rhetoric written for electronic publication. Some surprises were presented in the ways that readers approach the message according to its medium.

4.1 The Writer

My interviews with recruitment message writers revealed several similarities in the rhetorical situation between those who write viewbooks and those who write Web pages. All of the writers interviewed are experienced communications professionals who have been employed at their institution at least three years. The purpose (recruit prospective students) and audience (college-bound seniors, older adults and transfer students) for their communications parallel each other.

Beneath the surface similarities, however, lie fundamental differences in the medium, the creative process, and the execution of the message. The following section explores these differences by examining data found during the interview process.

Writers of university recruitment messages can usually be found in one of two places, either the university communications/public relations office or the admissions office. These writers go by various titles, such as "editor," "copywriter," "public relations director," or "assistant director of admissions." For my study, I will refer to authors of printed recruitment

messages as “writers” and authors of Web page recruitment materials as “authors/maintainers” because of the dual nature of their communication tasks.

When I began investigating the role of the writer in the recruitment rhetorical situation, I expected that role to be defined by the medium. For example, traditionally trained writers/communicators would write copy for the viewbook; whereas formally trained technical types would write copy for the university Web sites. I was partially correct. Of the three universities I contacted, all published recruitment message writers were experienced communications professionals with several years’ experience. Authors in the Web environment, however, also were communications professionals trained for the traditional, paper medium. In fact, one Web author/maintainer I interviewed holds a degree in English, with an emphasis in writing. Interestingly, the Web authors/maintainers at all three universities were originally hired to perform traditional communication tasks; their job descriptions changed with the evolution of Web technology.

For the Web site authors/maintainers in my study, a learning curve affected the writing process involved for their Web sites. While all had formal training in the traditional communication fields such as journalism, public relations, and even English, none had trained in a technological field such as computing.

Gerald Anglum, the Associate Director of Public Relations at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) and developer of its official Web site, describes the process at UNI:

'Basically, we had a functional Web site but it was real ugly. So they decided they wanted to make it more attractive ... and it was like 'Oh, that's Public Relations [the office].' So you went from people who knew a lot about computers and nothing about design to people who knew a lot about design and nothing about computers doing it [the site]. I spent about a year stomping my feet.'

Each Web site author/maintainer talked about learning by doing, and gathering information from fellow Web professionals at regional and national conferences.

4.1.1 Developing the Message

Viewbooks

Because writing style can magnify or obscure a message, I asked the writers how they approach the task and find their writing "voice." Each writer alluded to an element of "just knowing what sounds right" that usually comes with years of writing experience and talking with students. Donovan Honnold, writer of the UNI viewbook, comments, "I have to keep in mind who I'm writing for — students who are eighteen to twenty-four years old. I have to talk with them a lot." Before the viewbook writers in my study compose recruitment messages, they look to a combination of formal and informal research for topic ideas and a guide to writing style or voice. The university benefits, as determined through research, become the foundation for each university's message.

Honnold places the message development process in context: "We get

an idea through market research, focus groups, colleagues, brainstorming, whatever it takes.” After doing “whatever it takes” to determine its selling points, UNI touted the size of its college, distinguishing itself as the only mid-sized college in its state. A cost advantage over private institutions was considered another selling point. In addition, the smaller class sizes are a draw for potential applicants.

Karen Reidel, viewbook editor at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), relied upon consultant research and informal talks with students to determine the recruitment message. The independent consulting firm helped identify characteristics that distinguished UTSA from the four competing institutions in the city. The consultants found that affordability, accessibility, location, diversity, friendliness, and the variety of undergraduate majors are UTSA’s selling points. As a result, these benefits were incorporated into the viewbook message.

Reidel believes in conducting structured research to determine a recruitment message. She says, “Public schools [universities] are going to have to become more savvy as to how they recruit and target marketing. I don’t think we can take anything for granted. We’ve had this attitude, ‘We built it, you will come.’ And then they [the students] started not doing that.”

At the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC), Assistant Director of Admissions and viewbook co-author Janice Walker also uses a combination of internal and external research methods to develop selling points. “The message that we’re looking for is ‘what is it that we offer’ not what students are looking for, but rather what is it that they see when they’re

looking at us.” Research shows that the university’s strong programs in business, architecture, and engineering; location; smaller classroom size; low faculty to student ratio; and strong athletics program are all selling points to be emphasized in their recruitment materials.

Web Pages

Web authors/maintainers must develop text that will interest and inform a large and varied audience. Johnna Watson, admissions Web author at UNCC, believes the Web site’s purpose is two-fold: “It’s a tool to inform more than anything and also it encourages them [prospective students] to come to campus for a visit.” David Gabler, Director of External Relations at UTSA sees the site’s role in official recruitment as an emerging one: “Does it fit into our marketing plan? No, we haven’t gotten to that stage yet. I assure you that will happen soon. We frequently talk about the home page becoming perhaps the most important aspect of the marketing to prospective students.”

The dynamic nature of the Web and the ability to change information quickly and easily makes the Web author’s text a perpetual “work in progress.” David Gabler at UTSA discusses the need for continuous change on the Web site:

‘My philosophy with the home page is that it has now become a magazine cover. It’s not a static design which can stay the same. I think some of the most successful sites out there are ... media organizations like The New York Times and Cable News Network (CNN). They’re constantly changing.’

The need for change is recognized at UNCC, but when and how much is still a question says Johnna Watson:

'We've been in a quandary about how often we should change it. Really because it's for prospective students, the same group of students don't use it every year. We plan on modifying it, but not doing a grand change. Probably we'll do a grand change every two years.'

Writers in both environments do not act autonomously when composing their recruitment messages. Rather, content decisions are made through committees made up of admissions, communications, and marketing professionals within the university. Decisions made by the committees are influenced by a combination of formal and informal market research, namely focus groups and surveys.

Web site authors/maintainers enjoy more creative freedom than their print counterparts. Because Web technology is still relatively new and requires computing proficiency, those who are knowledgeable wield some power: "If I wanted to change the main page, I could do it tomorrow, but I'm not that much of a megalomaniac," says UNI's Gerald Anglum. Johnna Watson at UNCC, echoes this sentiment: "It's [Web page content] determined by me ... but I get input from the rest of the staff and from prospective students as well. I listen to their comments and suggestions. Some I take, some I don't."

My study revealed that university recruitment message writers don't all fit into the traditional role of writer as a creator of original text. While

viewbook writers produce copy for the recruitment publication, two of the three Web authors/maintainers interviewed simply translate pre-existing text into hypertext. Only Watson, the English major, composed an original welcome message for the admissions home page. Says Anglum at UNI, "I pretty much just cut things out of the news releases and paste it into the "What's Up" stuff. I use HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) for that." UTSA's David Gabler, uses the same "writing" technique. Given the evidence, can these Web authors/maintainers really be considered writers? Perhaps not in the traditional sense; however, they act as "authors" of the Web space through the decisions they make regarding organization and page presentation.

4.2 The Text

After considering the results of the surveys and focus groups, I wondered why some recruitment messages played more favorably with the audience than others. An examination of the individual texts reveals some patterns, depending upon the medium, and possible explanations. Table 1 compares the physical specifications of each publication. Tables 2 and 3 show the rhetorical situations for the viewbooks and Web sites.

When I began to read the texts of the viewbooks and Web pages, I labeled them as "warm and friendly" or "distant and professional" according to my own reactions to the text. A rhetorical analysis of each publication, paying close attention to pronoun usage, vocabulary, and sentence structure, as called for in Dillon's method revealed the writers' strategies.

Table 1**A Comparison of the Physical Specifications of Viewbooks and Web Sites***Viewbooks*

Specification	UNI	UTSA	UNCC
Size	10 x 14"	8.5 x 11"	8.5 x 11"
# of Pages	28 + cover	12 + cover	4 + cover
Photos (# & type)	62; 4-color	16; 4-color	14; 4-color
# of Words	approx. 12,880	approx. 1,900	approx. 850

Web Sites

Specification	UNI	UTSA	UNCC
Size	indeterminate	indeterminate	indeterminate
# of Pages*	9	?	12
Photos (# & type)	1; color	1; color	3; color
# of Words	approx. 281	approx. 108	approx. 304

* The number has been limited to only those pages the Web author is responsible for.

4.2.1 Viewbooks

UNI's A Great Place for You (see Appendix F) uses second-person pronouns extensively, a strategy that establishes a close relationship between writer and reader. In addition, first-person references are scattered throughout the publication in the form of student testimonials. The reader is addressed directly through questions constructed to provide information: "What does it take to get a degree?" (4) and "How do I join?" (13). At first, it would seem that question and answer strategies are one way of bringing the reader and writer closer together; however, Dillon shows another side to this

stylistic choice:

Using you, rhetorical questions, and questions from the audience are sometimes praised as ways of engaging or involving the reader in the text. However, insofar as they formulate a role for the reader, they may be resented as controlling or manipulative, or involve the reader in some complex role-playing such as imagining oneself as a member of a plural audience — i.e., other people are asking the stupid questions, not me. (23)

The vocabulary is easy-to-understand, with some campus-specific jargon used to include the reader in the university community: “Get Tubified!” (17). The text is written with a mix of long and short sentences with quite a bit of parenthetical comments and dashes for punctuation. Examples of parenthetical comments include directions to the reader such as “(see box)” (2) and qualifying explanations, “small classes — 90 percent of our classes have 50 or fewer students (some General Education courses may be larger, but you’ll still have study groups or individual time with your professor)” (4). The following sentences are representative of the viewbook’s punctuation with dashes: “UNI has more than 180 recognized student groups and organizations — academic, social, preprofessional, religious, athletic. They’re always looking for people — like you — who want to get involved, make a difference” (13). Text traits such as these are considered informal; therefore, they try to close the gap between writer and reader.

Although the information presentation is casual, it follows a logical

and traditional layout using headlines to signal paragraph content. The publication's tone is very conversational and close-up. UNI's viewbook is the largest publication of the three studied, totaling twenty-eight pages.

UTSA's publication, titled Your Best Choice, (see Appendix G) uses second person pronouns for the entire text, excluding the introduction, which is written using second person pronouns:

As part of the University of Texas System, UTSA:

- offers its students the advantage of an educational support system equal to any in the nation
- gives *you* the best value for your money, supported by financial aid and scholarship packages to help *you* pay the bills (1) (emphasis added).

The pronoun usage contributes to an overall "friendly" attitude on the part of the writer.

The vocabulary provides some distancing between writer and reader, however. For example, phrases such as "gamut of educational opportunities" (2) and higher education descriptors such as "under-represented groups" (3) clearly mark the writer as an official voice of the university who holds specialized knowledge.

The sentence structure, too, strikes a chord of formality by using traditional headlines signaling the content of following paragraphs and employing long sentences. For example, the headline "Welcome to UTSA" appears on the first page, followed by a bullet listing of the overall benefit of attending this university. Subheads such "The Campus," "The Faculty," "The

Students,” and “The Library” serve as clues to the reader regarding the content of the following paragraphs. The following sentence is indicative of the average sentence length found in the publication: “UTSA has launched one of the most ambitious building programs in the country, constructing a completely new campus and buildings for business and bio-science, all equipped with 21st-century technology” (3). Overall, the publication could be termed friendly and informative while keeping a respectful distance from the reader. This piece is the mid-sized publication of the three, with twelve pages of text.

UNCC’s four-page It’s Your Future viewbook (see Appendix H) uses a mix of first and third-person pronouns throughout; however, one second-person pronoun is used in the university career center section (4). No rhetorical questions are used to provide pre-determined “scripts” between writer and reader, which according to Dillon is a distancing technique. One cliché is found on page four, “Experience is the key that unlocks the door to your future.” Interestingly, the cliché is coupled with the one second-person pronoun, creating the “closest” sentence in the entire publication. The writer employed other rhetorical devices to establish a closer relationship between writer and reader: vocabulary is down-to-earth and information is provided in lists or “bullet points.” While the writer does provide some bridges between reader and writer, in general, the tone of the piece is distanced yet informative. UNCC’s viewbook uses the least words and paper of the three viewbooks I analyzed.

The rhetorical analysis revealed that although the writers used similar

processes to arrive at a written message, the form of each message was different. UNI's viewbook establishes the closest writer/reader relationship of the three, while UNCC's viewbook maintains the furthest distance between writer and reader. UTSA balanced rhetorical strategies for distance and proximity, situating itself in between the other two styles on the relationship spectrum.

In the focus groups, students rated UNCC's publication the highest, while giving the lowest marks to UNI's. Respondents made it clear in the focus group discussions that information was most important, and they did not appreciate extraneous verbiage that obscured the important information. UNCC's publication, with simple bullet lists and center page color map, provided the most useful information for prospective students.

Table 2
Viewbook Rhetorical Situation

Questions	UNI	UTSA	UNCC
Writer?	Publications Office writer and students	Director of Publications	Dir. & Assist. Dir. of Admissions
Research?	internal focus groups	internal surveys & focus groups	internal and external
Writing Time?	6 weeks	2-3 weeks	3 months
Shelf Life?	4 years	2 years	2-3 years
Copy Approval?	Admissions & public relations offices	Recruitment Office & college deans	Selected admissions counselors & faculty
Audience?	jrs. & srs; transfers	freshmen, transfers	freshmen, adults, transfers
Recruitment Role?	focal publication	focal publication	focal publication
Purpose?	recruit students	recruit students	provide info, prompt a visit

4.2.2 Web Pages

The interactive, dynamic, and visual context of the Web required a multi-layered rhetorical analysis. First I examined the text using Dillon's scale, then I examined the sites' visual rhetoric in terms of the information presentation and organization as outlined in Douglas Eymann's "Analysis and Evaluation of WWW Sites." Refer to Table 4 for a comparison of the Web sites based upon their content, presentation, and organization.

UNI's Web page (see Appendix I) is characterized by purple and gold color bars and graphic treatments. The main page serves as a directing device into more specific pages. The message becomes more targeted the further into the links one goes. The "Welcome" link for instance carries many of the same marketing messages found in UNI's viewbook. It takes two clicks to reach the admissions page, which is not maintained by the Office of Public Relations.

A textual analysis shows that the UNI's Web site employs first and second person pronouns, excluding the news items found under the "What's Up?" header on the front page. This familiar pronoun usage establishes a close relationship between the writer and reader. According to Dillon, a colloquial term such as "What's Up" "authenticates" the discourse "by projecting vitality, buoyancy, and good nature" (66). UNI's site has a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page, an online version of the question and answer format found in publications, that provides a pre-determined interchange between reader and writer. On the Web, however, a reader can get around this by asking a question of the author or maintainer via e-mail.

UNI's site does have an e-mail feedback link. Longer sentences found on the "What's Up" material lend a sophistication to the text, thereby distancing writer and reader. Overall, the site's text exhibits a close relationship between author and reader.

An examination of the visual rhetoric of the site yields other clues regarding the relationship between reader and writer. For example, the use of a personal welcome from the university president, including sound and video clips of his message to visitors, signals a close relationship. In addition with the quick loading time, about thirty seconds, the site also establishes an easy, close relationship between reader and text. But, the grainy, low-resolution photo of the campus bell tower at night on the main page could alienate some readers. Two menu bars are placed on the main page. The "Quick Links" offers the viewer a faster way to find specific information, rather than searching through the traditional menu buttons on the left hand side of the page.

The maintainer for the UTSA's main page network does not write original text for the site. As a result, there is little text on these pages and many links. The news stories provide the most text and are written by staff in the university communications office. Therefore, the copy reflects a journalistic style — shorter sentences and telescoping structure.

Pronouns are scarce throughout the text, except for "we" used on the introduction page for an announcement, establishing a greater distance between reader and writer. The terminology is not elevated, but includes one campus-specific jargon term: "ASAP" (Automated Student Access Program).

The acronym signals distance between the reader and writer because the writer must inform the reader what ASAP stands for. There is no FAQ page, but the reader can contact the Web author/maintainer through an e-mail feedback link. The presentation of the information is traditional, following a logical path through headlines.

Visually, the site creates a closer relationship between reader and writer than it does textually. Although copy is minimal, information links are large and clearly labeled. A pale peach background color coupled with purple for menu buttons and text is soothing. Long blocks of text are set in black, making it easy on the eyes. (Appendix J shows a print out of the UTSA home page. The reader will notice that the color of the background and text have changed since I first analyzed this site three months ago, another indicator of the ever changing nature of the Web.) Once loaded, the content is easy to read, and can be viewed on one screen, with some scrolling needed to view notations at the bottom. The organization of the main page is very clear. A second menu bar is used.

A visitor to UNCC's admissions Web site (see Appendix K) will find a four-paragraph welcome message underneath a graphic header that incorporates four small photos of the university (city skyline, students walking on campus, basketball game, statue). This same header appears on all pages that make up the admissions site. Of the three university Web pages analyzed, UNCC's is the most text heavy. The overall color scheme is green and gold, the school colors.

A textual examination reveals a shifting between pronoun usage. The

welcome message uses second person references throughout, while the other pages use third person pronouns in the information lists. There is no FAQ convention, but an e-mail feedback link is located on the front page. The tone of the welcome message is friendly and warm. The writer's point of view is one of an official university spokesperson, which creates distance; however, the friendly tone acts as a balance. A cliché, "life's work," is used in the welcome message which shows proximity. Campus-specific jargon in the form of acronyms, SOAR (Student Orientation And Registration) and OASES (Office of Adult Students and Evening Services) indicate a community apart from the reader.

The structure of the Web site itself bridges the distance created in the text. The page loads in thirty seconds using campus Internet access. Almost all of the page contents are visible without having to scroll downwards. The organization of the site allows viewers to read the welcome message or move directly to the menu items. Information is generally reached with one or two clicks of the mouse.

The nature of Web text makes it difficult to analyze rhetorically, especially when much of the text is menu options and link titles. Nevertheless, the manner in which text is presented and organized affect accessibility of the information, thereby creating a feeling of proximity or distance on the part of the reader. UNCC and UTSA employed clear organization and presentation strategies on their Web sites. Consequently those sites received positive reactions from my focus group participants.

Table 3
Web Site Rhetorical Situation

Questions	UNI	UTSA	UNCC
Writer?	Associate Director, Public Relations	Public Affairs Specialist	Associate Director for Operations Research
Content Determination?	University Relations Office	University Communications Office	Author w/ staff input.
Purpose?	Point of contact	Information	Inform and encourage campus visits.
Writing Time?	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
Shelf Life?	1-5 days	Changes frequently.	Changes as information changes.
Copy/content approval?	Ad hoc campus computing committee	No	No
Audience?	Pros. students; campus comm., alumni, general public.	Pros. students, pros. students' parents, pros. faculty.	Pros. students, transfers, non-traditional students
Recruitment Role?	Minor	Evolving	Evolving

Table 3 above compares the rhetorical situation of each Web site based upon its writers, content, purposes, writing time, approval processes, audience, and role in the overall recruitment process. Table 4 analyzes each Web site using some questions from Douglas Eyman's online site analysis assignment.

4.3 The Reader

The focus groups, set up at UNO, provided me with an opportunity to talk with the readers of the selected university recruitment messages. These students are fairly representative of the targeted audience of each university in my study, by virtue of their inclusion in the peer institution list. Two of the universities in my study are members of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, a group defined by a common mission to serve metropolitan area students. Students who attend public metropolitan universities, on average, apply to universities that are close to home and affordable.⁶ A larger number of nontraditional, adult students make up the student body, as well. Universities generally produce a separate recruitment publication targeted to these older students.

The intended audience for the viewbooks, according to the writer interviews, are high school juniors, seniors, recent graduates, or transfer students ranging in age from sixteen to twenty-four years. The audience, as revealed in the interviews for the Web sites is much larger and diverse. Gerald Anglum, the Associate Director of Public Relations at UNI and the developer of its official Web site, sees the basic university constituency as its audience: "We're trying to sell this product [the university] to a lot of

Table 4
Web Site Analysis

Content Criteria	UNI	UTSA	UNCC
Spelling/grammar errors	no	no	no
Current Info?	yes	yes	yes
Image:Text ratio	20:80	20:80	30:70
Appropriate images?	yes	yes	yes
Writing Style?	persuasive & informative	informative	persuasive & informative
Presentation Criteria	UNI	UTSA	UNCC
Ease of reading	varies	yes	yes
Background distracting?	no	no	no
Interactive extras?	audio & video clips	no	no
Image resolution?	poor	fair	clear
Graphics overused?	no	no	no
Loading Time?	30 secs	45 secs	30 secs
Effective color use?	varies	yes	yes
Organization Criteria	UNI	UTSA	UNCC
Logical path to info?	haphazard	clear	clear
Navigation?	menu bars (2)	menu bar, buttons	linked text topics, buttons
Links connected to text?	varies	yes	varies
Response mechanism?	e-mail	e-mail	e-mail

different people ... prospective students, current campus community, policy makers, the business community, alumni ... the general public, sports fans." David Gabler, Director of External Relations at UTSA cites prospective students, prospective students' parents, and prospective faculty as the site's audience. "Also, maybe by default, our site serves as sort of an intranet.⁷ So we are concerned about on-campus users and what they can find." Johnna Watson at UNCC sees the page's main audience as prospective students consisting of freshmen, transfers, and nontraditional adult students.

I limited my examination of the audience for this study to the traditional-aged prospective student (16 to 24 years old). This age bracket can present certain challenges to the marketer. According to psychologists Dan Acuff and Robert Reiher, the 16-to-19-year-old perceives messages through a "perceptual filter or window that ... is focused to a great degree on his future, i.e., his relationships and his career" (130). Another psychological marker of this age group is the ability to make discriminating choices. Consumers in this age bracket are beginning to connect products to personal needs. Nevertheless, Acuff and Reiher point out that innovative packaging, variety, "lots of special effects, images, and more complex combinations of elements" make advertising messages more attractive to this age group (133-134).

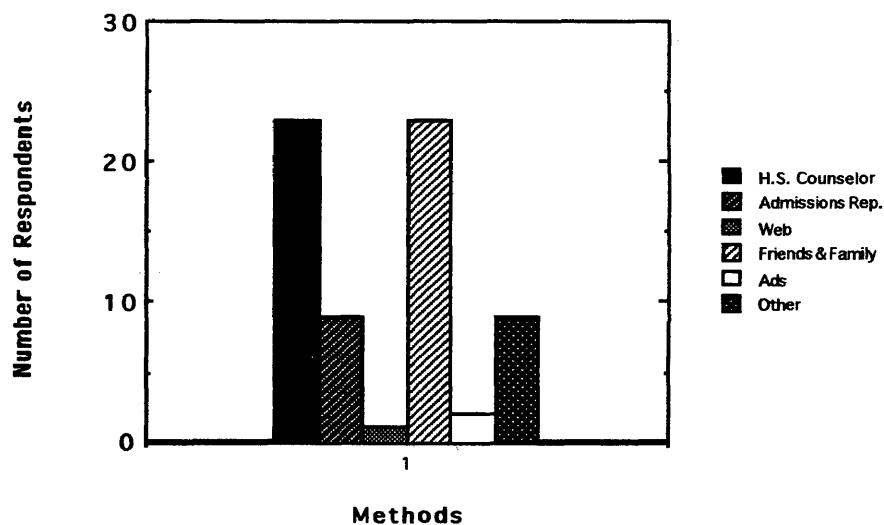
The students in two sections of a first year college composition course fall into the viewbook target audience age bracket, and therefore served as participants in my informal focus group. Comments about the viewbooks during the focus group itself centered on the layout and design of the publications. Before the group began commenting aloud on each viewbook, I

had each student complete a general College Selection Student Survey and an institution-specific Recruitment Publications survey. Students in a different first year college composition course participated in my Web site focus group. Participants in this group focused on the design and ease of navigation through the three sites. The fourteen students completed a general College Selection Student Survey and an institution-specific Web Site Student Survey before commenting aloud.

The graph below shows the respondents' preferred methods of gathering information while looking for colleges and universities.

Figure 1

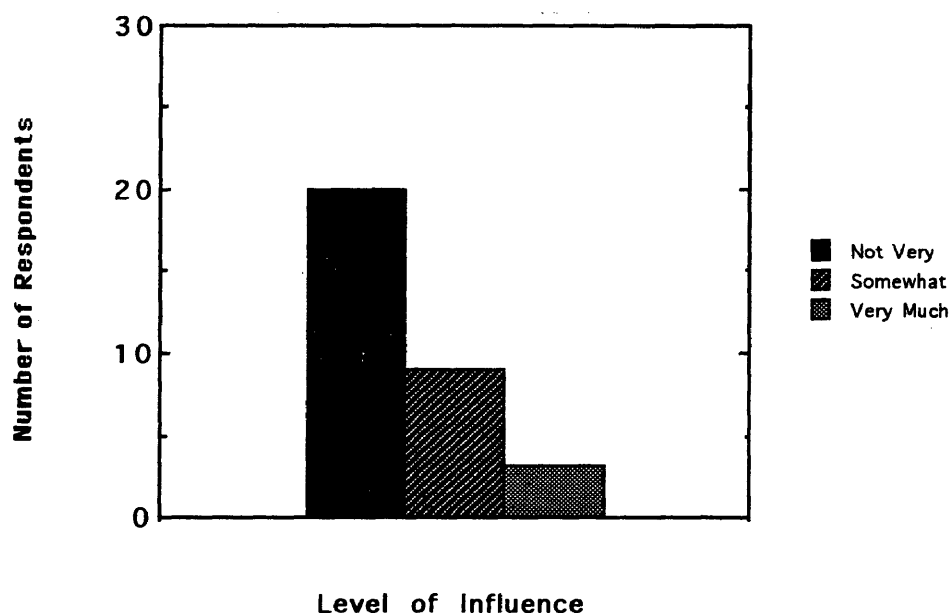
Information Gathering Habits for Prospective College Applicants



The following graph measures the reported influence of recruitment materials upon the respondents' decision-making process.

Figure 2

Recruitment Message Influence Upon Prospective Applicants



4.3.1 Readers' Reactions to Selected Recruitment Messages

Viewbooks

Each institution-specific survey instructed the respondent to read the attached viewbook, then rate the helpfulness of the publication's information and list the benefits of attending that university. Refer to Table 5 for an overview of the students' evaluations of the viewbooks. Of the four respondents to UNI's viewbook, A Great Place for You!, one rated the information not very helpful, two rated it somewhat helpful, and one rated it very helpful. The benefits, as interpreted by the readers, include: safety, small town atmosphere, scholarships, and student activities. The author cited its medium size compared to other state institutions, cost advantage over private institutions, and smaller class size as UNI's selling points. A

comparison of the two lists reveals no correlation between the intended and perceived selling points.

Of the four students who responded to the UTSA viewbook, Your Best Choice, two felt that the information was not very helpful, while one considered it somewhat helpful, and another found it very helpful. A compiled list of the reader's perceived benefits of attending the UTSA includes: study with international students, location, educational support system, best value for student, facilities, students get one of the best educational opportunities in the state, cultural diversity, awards (financial), and that students come first at the UTSA. A quick comparison to the author's selling points of affordability, accessibility, location, diversity, friendliness, and variety of undergraduate majors shows that three messages (cultural diversity, location, and students come first [friendliness]) were clearly received by the reader.

Three respondents to UNCC's It's Your Future viewbook rated the information as somewhat helpful, while a fourth respondent rated it as very helpful. Respondents' perceived benefits included: an opportunity to meet new people, fun place to attend, location, academic standings, and financial aid. Janice Walker, the publication's author, listed the university's strong programs in business, architecture, and engineering; location; smaller classroom size; low faculty to student ratio; and strong athletics program as benefits. A comparison between the readers' and writer's list shows that two messages were successfully received by the audience: location and strong academic programs in business, architecture, and engineering.

Table 5
Students' Viewbook Evaluations

Questions	UNI	UTSA	UNCC
Does the publication effectively describe the university?	3-somewhat; 1-very much	2-somewhat; 2-very much	3-somewhat; 1-very much
Is the information helpful?	1-not very; 2-somewhat; 1-very much	2-not very; 1-somewhat; 1-very much	3-somewhat; 1-very much

Web Pages

Twelve participants completed the University of Northern Iowa Web Site Survey, which instructed them to browse the Web site for five to seven minutes, rate the helpfulness of the information, and record the perceived benefits of attending. Refer to Table 6 for an overview of the participants' evaluations of the Web pages. Of the twelve participants, seven found the information presented somewhat helpful, four considered it very helpful, while one participant felt it was not very helpful. A list of the readers' perceived benefits includes: quality education, diverse student population, summer activities, a variety of degrees offered, good community to live in, personalized attention, great teaching, and student activities. It should be noted that four respondents didn't perceive any benefits on the Web site, and gave no explanation. A comparison of the viewbook perceived benefits and the Web page perceived benefits shows a correlation on two points: community atmosphere and student activities.

Of the fourteen respondents to the University of Texas at San Antonio

Web Site survey, five rated the information as somewhat helpful, eight considered it very helpful, and one respondent rated it as not helpful. Respondents' perceived benefits included: internationally renowned professors, many degrees offered, good academic programs, good athletic programs, and location in a big city. Interestingly, eight participants did not perceive any benefits. One commented on the survey, "Need to have benefits that stand out on the first page, or make it easier to find." Another echoed this sentiment: "Benefits not clear at first." After comparing the perceived benefits found in the viewbook, strong academic programs and location appear on both lists.

Of the fourteen respondents to the University of North Carolina at Charlotte Web Site survey, nine considered the information presented somewhat helpful; five considered the information very helpful. Many international students, large selection of majors, location, strength of the basketball program, age of institution (part of one of the oldest university systems in the nation), student activities, and personalized attention are included on the participants' list of perceived benefits. Three students, however, didn't perceive any benefits and offered no explanation. A comparison to the perceived benefits list from the viewbook focus group indicates a correlation on two points: location and campus atmosphere.

Table 6
Students' Web Site Evaluations

Questions	UNI	UTSA	UNCC
Does the Web site effectively describe the university?	5-somewhat; 7-very much	3-not very; 4-somewhat; 7-very much	2-not very; 7-somewhat; 4-very much
Is the information helpful?	1-not very; 7-somewhat; 4-very much	1-not very; 4-somewhat; 8-very	9-somewhat; 5-very much

An Interpretation

While the survey results provided respondents' general reactions to the viewbooks and Web sites, the focus groups gave me the opportunity to draw out specific reasons for their apparent like or dislike of the publications. In the focus group setting, the UNCC viewbook tested the strongest. At least one person from each group gave it high marks for its brevity and easy-to-locate facts. Two female students commented, "We think it's short and to the point. Full of good stuff." A male student said, "It doesn't beat around the bush." The UTSA viewbook received no truly negative remarks, although some participants felt it didn't offer enough information about its athletic programs. UNI's A Great Place for You! drew the most heat from participants. Two students labeled it as "boring" due to what they considered dated photos and superfluous student testimonials: "They [the viewbook writers] interviewed what the students thought about it. They didn't really inform us about it."

The reference to photos was very telling. The students in both focus

groups were very influenced by the photos in all publications. The majority of the students felt that the photos had to grab their attention before they would read the publication. If not, the viewbook would be tossed into the trash. Other graphical treatments made an impression as well. Bright colors and helpful tools such as campus maps set publications apart from the crowd. The thickness of the publications was important too — the heavier the piece, the more impressive it appeared. The students equated heaviness with expense.

On the Web side, UNCC's site garnered the most favorable comments. One male participant said, "It was helpful and the best one of the three." "The first graphics tell you a lot, just with the little pictures," said a female participant, referencing the unifying header found on each page. UTSA's Web site drew some balanced remarks: "The information is divided well, but it doesn't sell the school. It doesn't say 'This is why you should come here,' it's just saying 'This is what we have.'" As in the viewbook focus group, UNI's fared the least well. A male participant remarked, "I had to connect to six different sites before I found what I wanted. It took too long." Another described the graphics as "horrible." While these remarks reflect the general feeling of the participants, the surveys yielded positive and negative remarks regarding all three Web sites.

The most important factor for the participants appeared to be ease of navigation through the site. They simply had no patience for slow-loading or unorganized sites. The relevance of the information on the site was another deciding factor, although they didn't appreciate having to "dig" for it. The

visual presentation concerned these students the least. In fact, two-thirds of the participants rated text as more effective than graphics in conveying the Web site message. UTSA's Web site was the only one that students' considered to be defined by its graphics.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Implications of the Study

The rhetoric of recruitment blends the right amount of information and persuasion to make a sale. The unique attributes of the medium, the writer, and the content ensure that each publication will connect with the reader in a different way, some effectively, some not at all. Recognizing the the most effective methods of communicating a marketing message can save thousands of dollars, not to mention the many hours spent writing and designing the message.

While recruitment publications, both printed and electronic, represent a specialized genre, the lessons learned from studying recruitment rhetoric at work in its differing media can benefit rhetoricians. The relative youth of Internet communication and lack of significant studies regarding the rhetorical conventions of communicating electronically, provide an endless frontier for research. Comparing printed rhetoric to Web rhetoric offers a nice jumping off point — it's easier to examine something when one has a point of reference to follow.

I formulated three guiding questions as I began my own study of the rhetorics of print and electronic recruitment messages:

- 1) What are the rhetorical strategies of college and university printed and electronic recruitment messages?
- 2) How do writers of recruitment messages approach their tasks? How does the medium affect the writing process?

3) Which medium is more effective, according to its audiences and purposes?

In attempting to answer my questions, I found that there are many similarities in the rhetorical strategies used for printed and electronic recruitment messages. First and foremost, the writers must know their audience. All of the writers in my study employed formal and informal research techniques to do just that. As Donovan Honnold at the University of Northern Iowa put it, "The worst thing you can do is say 'I'm going to write a viewbook' and then close your door."

Second, the writers must present the features of their institutions in the form of benefits to potential students. The manner in which these features were presented became the tools of persuasion. As my surveys and focus groups revealed, not all forms of persuasion were effective. Writerly decisions such as employing questions and answer strategies, addressing the reader directly with first-person pronouns, and conveying the message with long sentences all affected the way the messages were perceived. Of course, my participant sample was small and geographically limited. Perhaps the recruitment messages would have been received differently in another part of the country by a larger sample.

Third, visual rhetoric is a vital element of the recruitment message. Focus group participants reacted to the graphic elements of the printed and electronic publications before they read the text. Dated photographs of poor quality reflected negatively upon the message. In many cases, the students wouldn't stop to read the text if the photographs weren't compelling.

The differences between the two media, perhaps, yields the most interesting findings, however. With each difference comes the question, “Why is this so?”, which invites further research.

The greatest difference between the two media is the role of the writer. Web “authors” approach the text differently. Two of the three authors interviewed are completely removed from the text creation process, functioning only as editors or manipulators of text. Although feedback was requested from visitors on each site through e-mail feedback buttons, the final decision rested with the person maintaining the page. Additionally, these writers didn’t benefit from the base of knowledge that comes from performing a job for several years, as the viewbook writers do. Not one of the Web authors/maintainers had been working on the Web for more than three years, although each one was a seasoned print communications professional. Also, the Web author’s work is essentially never done — the Web page is a dynamic publication undergoing constant updates and refinements to the message. Once the viewbook goes to press, the job is done for at least one year.

The Web site reader provides another point of differentiation between the two rhetorical situations. Readers of Web sites are much more conscientious of time. When readers are looking for specific information, they don’t want to be hampered by complicated graphics and technical gimmicks that take a long time to load. Viewbook readers on the other hand, are willing to spend time with the publication, if they feel it provides useful information. Several focus group participants mentioned that they

still had viewbooks in their rooms from the year before, simply because they were “cool.”

Inevitably, when one compares one message medium to another, the question arises — which is more effective? The publication and Web survey results point to the efficacy of the printed medium. Even so, printed information isn't the preferred choice of prospective students. Students are more comfortable gathering information from sources they trust, and according to my surveys, they trust friends and family over printed or Web information sources. Accessibility is another factor. Just about anyone can pick up the phone or mail a reply card and request printed information be sent to their home. Conversely, not everyone has a computer at home where they can sit and “shop” at leisure. Reidel at University of Texas at San Antonio corroborates: “I think there's an assumption that we're making because we're in academics, that everyone out there has home computers. That's not true.” Even so, recruitment professionals can make it their business to find out how many of the potential students in their market have access to computers and the Web; otherwise, their Web message is lost.

Even in the best mix of compelling graphics and words, the message isn't transmitted with a one hundred percent accuracy rate. Less than fifty percent of the viewbooks' intended messages were received by the audience in my study. And of those respondents over half felt that recruitment publications had very little effect on their college choice. As far as the Web goes, it still isn't a major player in the recruitment game, according to my surveys. Of the thirty-two respondents to the College Selection Survey, only

one had used the World Wide Web to gather information about colleges when they were looking to apply for undergraduate study.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Recruitment Professionals

Printed and electronic recruitment messages are most effective when they provide helpful information. The persuasive element appears in the facts, not in the attempt to “script” the readers’ perceptions of the publication and the institution. Despite efforts to target messages to specific audiences, the audience will always be amorphous — not every 16 to 24 year old will bring the same experiences or expectations to the college selection process. Some may be impressed by oversized envelopes containing catalog-like recruitment publications. Others are looking for facts only.

When viewbook and Web site developers are brainstorming next year’s recruitment theme, they should remember that students appreciate uncomplicated and useful messages. Alternative methods of message communication should be considered. The surveys clearly show that students prefer to gather information about colleges and universities from friends and family. Colleges and universities should direct messages toward this audience through brochures meant for parents or university-sponsored events such as career fairs, academic bowls, and sporting events.

Of course, the Internet is not the only high-tech format that university recruiters can use to reach the influencing audience they seek. CD-ROMS can be one way to reach the families of potential students. In addition to the usual university recruitment message, the CD could include information

regarding financing a college education, or a look at the city in which the university is located. The combination of information would create a valuable resource package.

I am not suggesting that university communications professionals abandon printed and electronic recruitment publications; rather, the rhetoric of recruitment publications should shift into an informative instead of a persuasive mode. The campus visit, with its sights, experiences, and human interaction can “sell” the institution much better than any printed or electronic facsimile.

5.2.2 Rhetoricians

The opportunity is ripe for anyone interested in Web rhetoric to conduct an in-depth investigation. My own search for substantive studies in that area yielded a small body of research. The investigation I completed was small in scope, a pilot study, really. If given more time and money, the research could be expanded to include many different universities from across the country. One study could focus on state institutions, another on private institutions. The increased data would reveal patterns in the rhetoric and in reader perception that can't be extrapolated from my study.

For example, more time could be spent with the writers of paper and electronic recruitment publications, observing them as they make their writing decisions. Perhaps a think-aloud protocol could be applied. Another interesting aspect to observe would be the interaction between the writers and the other recruitment committee members. Again, an on-site researcher could have the opportunity to ask questions immediately, and observe the

writing process in an objective manner.

More information is needed regarding student access to the Internet. My study showed that only one student had used the Internet to conduct his college search. I suspect that small number doesn't reflect the national average. A good empirical study would give shape to what is now a hazy uncertainty about students and their computer and Internet usage.

Today, very little is known about the ways readers react to text on the Web. It is true that we have an idea about what constitutes preferable navigation on the Internet, as reflected in the style guides, but maybe we can discover better methods. Observation of students using computers in the classroom, surveys and interviews done on a large scale would yield valuable information to recruitment professionals and rhetoricians alike.

Web rhetoricians are faced with the challenge of analyzing documents both textually and visually. The former is nothing new to the field; however, some may feel daunted by the latter. Therefore, it may be a temptation for traditional rhetoricians to focus solely on the textual elements of the Internet, and leave the visuals to the designers and graphic artists. I see this as a mistake that must be avoided. The visual aspect of Web communication cannot be overlooked, or separated from the textual rhetoric of the Web. The text influences the visual elements, and the visual elements emphasize the text, when done correctly. Rhetoricians, therefore, will have to adapt to this dichotomy by blending textual and visual rhetoric into their evaluations and studies. This new blend could, some day, become a whole new area of rhetorical focus.

Internet communication is here to stay, even though printed text remains dominant. Rhetoricians should explore and attempt to understand the rhetorical strategies of this new medium because it may one day become the standard rather than the exception.

Notes

- ¹ The statistics given by Gates can be found on the Microsoft Corporate Web site, <<<http://www.microsoft.com/BillGates/default.htm>>>.
- ² Conlon's Web site is located at
<<<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/CLAS/american-universities.html>>.
- ³ While the hypertext environment offers enriched information options, those increased options may negatively affect readers' comprehension of the hypertext material. Peter Foltz conducted a study comparing readers' comprehension of traditional, published (linear) texts with non-linear hypertext. Readers comprehended similar amounts of text in both text formats. Foltz believes these results show that readers display "global comprehension" when reading both types of text formats (127). Despite readers' innate capabilities of navigating through text, Foltz recommends that hypertext designers make the readers' task as easy as possible. Providing a clear map of the hypertext structure goes a long way in helping the reader, as well as keeping the readers' strategies in mind. Those strategies depend upon the reader's goal when approaching the text (129).
- ⁴ George Landow, author of the book Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology, defines hypertext as "text composed of blocks of words (or images) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains, or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality described by the terms link, node, network, web, and path ..." (3). According to

Landow, the term “hypertext” was first coined by the computer scientist Theodor H. Nelson in the 1960s.

⁵ George Dillon developed a method of analyzing what he calls the “footing,” or the relationship between the writer and perceived reader in his book, Rhetoric as Social Imagination. Dillon explains that the relationship between writer and reader has traditionally been considered “analyzable into somewhat metaphorical vectors of approach and distance or aggression and ingratiation” (17). He counters this traditional approach with a five-tiered analysis that differentiates the “complexly related dimensions” known as personal/impersonal, solidary/distant, equal/superior, oblique/confrontive, and informal/formal footings with the reader. Style considerations such as pronoun use and sentence structure are taken into account in his analysis.

⁶ According the Metropolitan Universities Coalition document “Who Are We?” a characteristic that defines these institutions is the type of students they serve: “The majority of our students comes from our metropolitan regions. Our students are highly diverse in age, ethnic and racial identity, and socio-economic background, reflecting the demographic characteristics of their region. Many come to us by transfer from community colleges and other baccalaureate institutions, many are place-bound employees and commuters, and many require substantially longer than the traditional time to graduate, for financial and other personal reasons.”

⁷ An intranet is an internal network of information, accessible only to those who have password privileges. Many corporations and now universities are

establishing this system of separating internal messages from external messages. An intranet is maintained within the organization, unlike the Internet, which is maintained through servers around the world. The University of Texas at San Antonio and the University of Northern Iowa were in the process of establishing an intranet at the time of this study.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. How do you arrive at a particular theme/message for your viewbook?
2. Who is your intended audience?
3. What is the purpose of your publication?
4. What is the "shelf life" of your recruitment message?
5. What prompts changes to your recruitment message? (i.e. survey results, changes in enrollment?)
6. Who writes your viewbook copy?
7. How long does the writing stage of the viewbook production process last? Why? Does this vary from year to year?
8. What is the copy approval process for your publication?
9. Do you test your recruitment message? If so, how?
10. How does your viewbook fit into your overall recruitment process? Is it the focal piece, or is it a supplemental piece?
11. What are the selling points, or benefits, of your university? How are these benefits determined (i.e. surveys, word of mouth, tradition)?
12. Do you have any additional comments about the recruitment message copy writing process?

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. How is your university's Web site content determined?
2. Who is your intended audience?
3. What is the purpose of your Web site?
4. What is the "shelf life" of your university web site?
5. What prompts changes to your Web site content?
6. Who writes the copy for your official university Web site?
7. How do you decide what tone or voice to use as you write your copy?
8. How long does the writing stage of the Web text process last? Why? Does this vary from year to year?
9. What is the content approval process for your Web site?
10. How does the official university web site fit into the overall recruitment process?
11. Do you have any additional comments about the recruitment message copy writing process?

Appendix C

College Selection Survey

Directions: This is an anonymous survey. Please respond to the following three questions by marking the answer that best describes your college selection experience. Thank you for your help.

1. When you were looking at universities/colleges to attend, did recruitment publications (viewbooks, brochures, letters) influence your decision? (Place an X next to the response that best fits.)

_____ Not very _____ Somewhat _____ Very much

Why or why not?

2. In what ways did you obtain information about colleges/universities you were interested in attending? (Place an X next to all that apply.)

_____ High School Guidance Counselor

_____ Admissions Representative from the college or university

_____ College or university Web site

_____ Friends and family

_____ Advertising: radio, t.v., or newspaper ads

_____ Other: _____

Of the above methods, which was most helpful? _____

3. What factors were most important to you when choosing a college or university? (Place a 1 next to the most important, a 2 next to the second most important, etc.)

_____ Cost

_____ Location

_____ Reputation

_____ Academic Programs Offered

_____ Campus Life

_____ Other: _____

Appendix D

Recruitment Publications Survey

Directions: Spend about 5-7 minutes reading through the attached viewbook. Discuss your responses to the following questions as a group. Designate one member of your group as a secretary to record your group's responses. Thank you for your help.

1. Does this publication describe the university and the benefits of attending it? (Place an X next to the response that best fits.)

_____ Not very _____ Somewhat _____ Very much

Why or why not?

2. What are the benefits of attending this university, according to the publication?

3. What type of image does this publication convey?

4. How does the publication convey this image?

5. What, in your opinion, is this publication's purpose?

6. Do you find the information presented in this publication helpful?

_____ Not very _____ Somewhat _____ Very much

Why or why not? _____

Appendix E

Web Site Survey

Directions: Spend about 5-7 minutes browsing through the university Web site then respond to the following questions. Thank you for your help.

1. What is your first impression of this Web site?

2. Why?_____

3. Do you find the information presented in this Web site helpful?

_____Not very _____Somewhat _____Very much

Why or why not?

4. Does the Web site effectively describe the university?

_____Not very _____Somewhat _____Very much

Why or why not?

5. What are the benefits of attending this university, according to the Web site text?

6. What is more effective to you as you browse the site:?

_____text _____graphics

Why?_____

7. Would this Web site influence your decision to apply for admission?


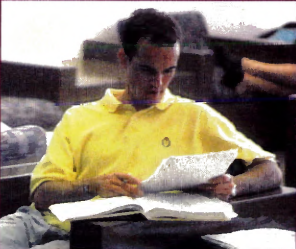


_____Not very _____Somewhat _____Very much

Why or why not?_____

Appendix F

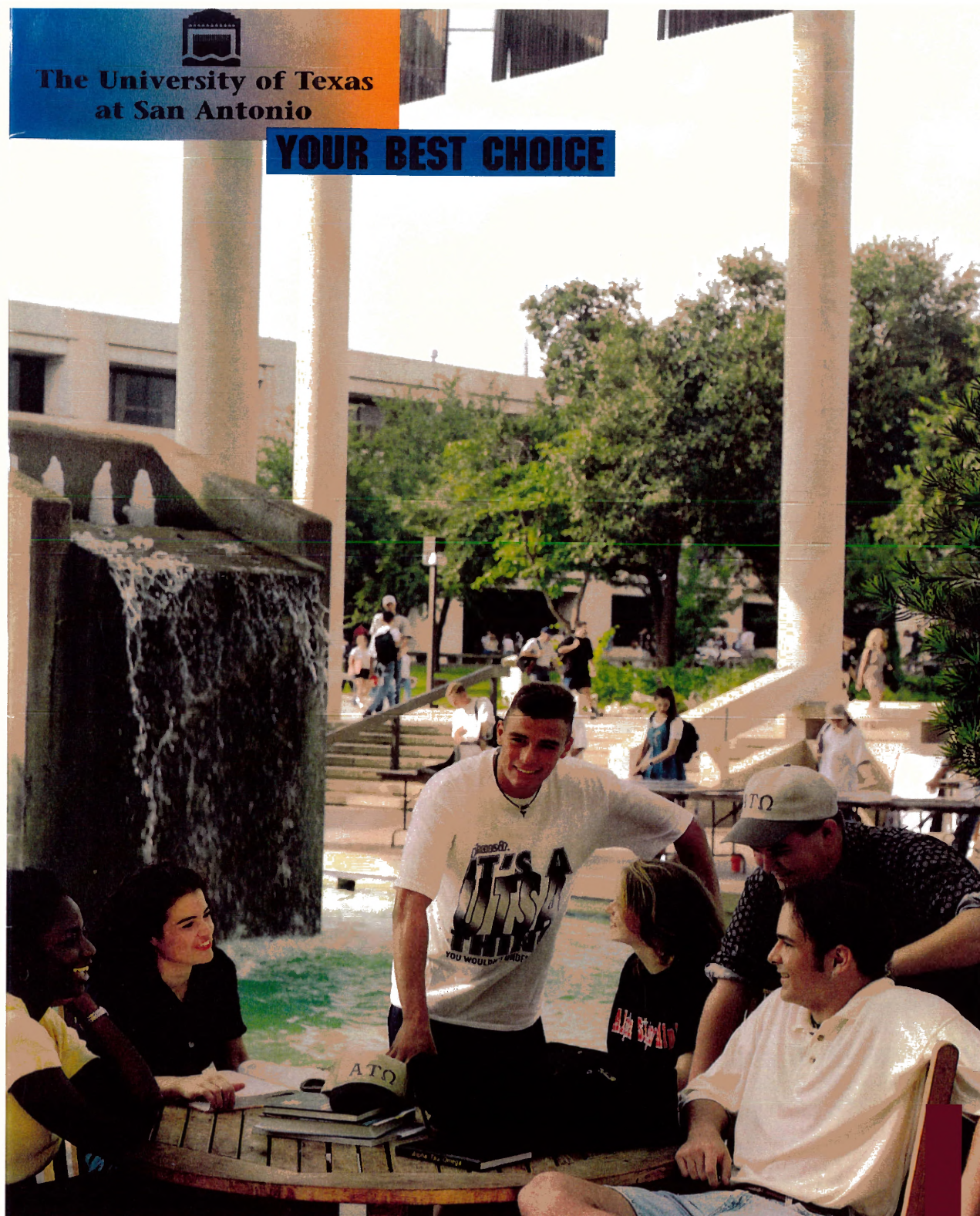
A
great
place
for
you!

Viewbook 1997-98

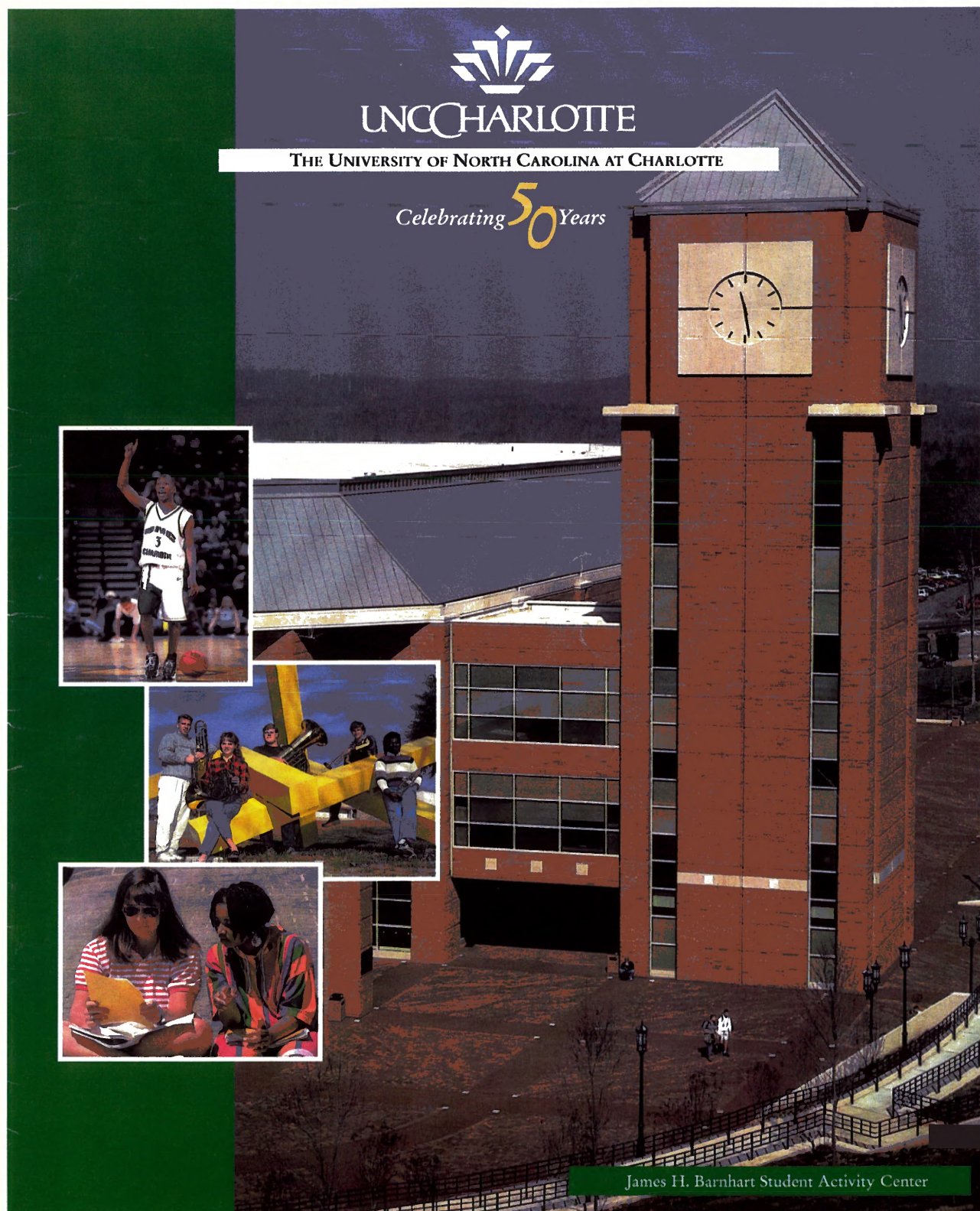


**University of
Northern Iowa**

Appendix G



Appendix H



James H. Barnhart Student Activity Center

Appendix I

Welcome to UNI

<http://www.uni.edu/index.htm>**Information
& Directories****Campus
Update****Admissions &
Financial Aid****Student Life
& Services****Colleges &
Departments****Administration
& Support****Outreach &
Partnerships****Alumni &
Foundation**

University of Northern Iowa



What's up at UNI

University of Northern Iowa Presidential Scholars, accustomed to passing academic exams with ease, are facing a test of another kind. The students are exploring the wilderness July 25-August 16 by hiking through rain forests and along coastal cliffs in Washington, 15 miles up a mountain in Oregon, to the highest point in Utah and into a basin surrounded by 14,000-foot peaks in the heart of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. The UNI Presidential Scholars' "Wildness and Wilderness" seminar involves more than living without modern conveniences for nearly three weeks. They have also been challenged to research and study national environmental issues, test their physical strength and endurance, and practice essential survival skills. For more information, [click here](#).

If you'd like to see video clips of UNI in Motion, follow [this link](#).

Quick **UNI** Links

Welcome from President Koob

**Phone and
E-mail Directory****FAQ****UNI Calendar****Places to visit****Campus Map****Academic
Departments****Athletics****About this WWW
Space****Access UNI****World Wide Wisdom****Great Teaching**

UNI Net Search

Appendix J

The University of Texas at San Antonio

wysiwyg://5/http://www.utsa.edu

[Students](#)[Faculty/Staff](#)[Alumni](#)[Parents](#)[Visitors](#)[About UTSA](#)[Jobs](#)[Maps](#)[Directory](#)[News](#)[Search](#)[ASAP](#)

The University of Texas at San Antonio
6900 North Loop 1604 West
San Antonio, TX 78249
(210) 458-5142

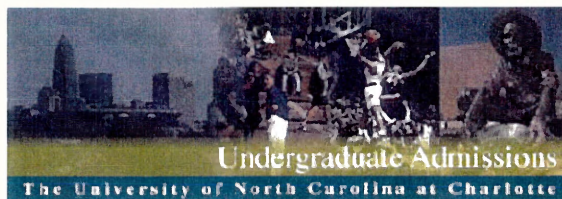
Send questions or comments about [this site](#) to webteam@utsa.edu

This page was last updated on:
Thursday, August 6, 1998.

Appendix K

index

http://www.uncc.edu/admission


[Freshman](#)
[Transfer](#)
[International](#)

[OASES](#)
 (Office of Adult
 Students
 and Evening Services)

[Academic Programs](#)
[General Information](#)
[Contact Admissions](#)

[What's New](#)
[@ UNC Charlotte](#)

[Campus Visit](#)
[Open House](#)
[Related Links](#)

WELCOME!

Of all the milestones in your life, few are as important - or as exciting - as going to college. Decisions abound: where to go, what to major in, how to discover your true "life's work." At The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, going to college can be as exciting as it gets.

The University is a modern campus that is also part of one of the oldest university systems in the United States. Established in 1965 as one of the 16 campuses of the University of North Carolina system, UNC Charlotte can trace its history back to 1946 with the establishment of the Charlotte Center of the University of North Carolina. Situated on a beautiful 950-acre campus, the University is located just eight miles from one of the fastest growing and most prosperous metropolitan areas in the country today. With more than a million people, Charlotte and the surrounding area are alive with the pulse of cultural, social, and recreational advantages, all of which enlarge and enhance your educational experience.

UNC Charlotte is committed to personalized attention. You are important and you can be a vital part of the campus. You can select from 60 majors, including the liberal arts and five fully-accredited professional programs: Architecture, Business Administration, Education, Engineering, and Nursing and Health Professions. Within each college you'll find many options for specialized areas of study.

We invite you to explore the many opportunities available at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte!

[[UNC Charlotte](#)] [[Charlotte's Web](#)]

To request admissions materials or check the status of your application, please go to the [Contact Admissions](#) page.

Office of Undergraduate Admissions
 9201 University City Boulevard